



Whether Common or Not

By WILL M. MAUPIN.

In the Old Days

Really I do not recall just what started it, but I opine that it was a chance remark dropped by a friend of mine. We were chatting about boyhood pranks and he said something about a rag carpet, whereupon was started a train of thought that kept bubbling away until I couldn't resist the temptation to sit down and write about it.

The very mention of "rag carpet" called to mind a little cottage in a very small village; a cottage that stood back from the street beneath the wide-spreading maples, with an old wooden pump near the kitchen door, and just below the pump a little structure, half hole in the ground and half roof. A trough led from the pump spout into this little structure, and all the waste water from the well flowed through this little shed and around the crocks of milk that mother kept there. My, such crocks of milk—cream on 'em so thick a spider could skate across and never leave a track. A little further away, and between the cottage and the barn, was the old ash hopper, and still further along the woodpile. I'm not going to dwell on that woodpile, for it seemed to me in those old days that I spent most of my time in its immediate vicinity. I prefer the ash hopper to the woodpile, there being an intimate relation between them. Every fall, as winter drew near, I carried water to that ash hopper, and watched the lye dripping therefrom, rejoicing that it meant "cracklings." Honestly, I believe I could make a pretty fair article of soft soap even now.

When mother rendered the lard she'd skim off the "cracklings," and we children—just the two of us then—would eat until the grease stood out on our noses. And then, after every edible scrap was worked up mother would boil soap, and sister and I would carry the chips and keep the kettle boiling, and have oodles of fun.

But the rag carpet! Why it just recalled the little Mason & Hamlin organ in the front room, and—Say, I wonder if they still make 'em, with the one stop you pulled out that shut off the reeds and let you make music sort o' like bells. You know what I mean. And another stop that made the notes sound kind o' trem'ly, as mother described it. All I got to say is that if I had that little old Mason & Hamlin organ in my front room this minute I wouldn't trade it off for the grandest grand piano that ever was made.

And right over that organ hung a couple of the beautifullest pictures that ever were made. Father got 'em as premiums with a year's subscription to Mr. Beecher's "Hearth and Home." Mr. Beecher's name was one to conjure with in those days, especially in a country preacher's home. Course you remember the two pictures. One of them represented the most impossibly pretty baby with her eyes shut and her head resting on a bunch of flowers that never grew anywhere, and was labeled "Fast Asleep." The other was the same impossibly pretty baby with her eyes open and gazing off into space. This was one labeled "Wide Awake." And if you sat on the organ stool for a while, gazing up at these two wonderful works of art, then turned just for one quarter of the way around to the right your eyes fell upon another great work of art. It was the picture of a very

moist looking maiden maintaining a precarious hold upon a mighty smooth looking rock sticking up out of a wide expanse of very restless ocean, the rock being surmounted by a cross. "Rock of Ages," it was, and I'll venture to say that same maiden is still maintaining that same precarious hold upon that same rock in a thousand or more homes in this land of ours. As a small boy I used to wonder how in the name of goodness that distressed looking maiden ever managed to swim out as far as that rock, and what she wanted out therefor, anyhow.

And after gazing on this distressed maiden for a time, if you just made another quarter turn to the right you saw another picture. It was the face of a very stern though kindly looking gentleman with a high and limp white collar surrounded by a very "bunchy" looking black necktie. "Stock" they used to call it, I believe. That's the only picture of all in that little cottage that I have left. It hangs upon the wall of my home "den" as I write these lines, and it helps to span the long years between the then and the now. Of course I do not expect my Methodist and Presbyterian and Episcopalian and Congregational and Baptist friends to understand it, but that picture of Alexander Campbell is going to remain in my family just as long as the canvas holds to the frame.

Now just make another quarter turn to the right. That's a wall basket you see hanging there. I can't describe it very well, but you old-timers will recognize it. Just about the time I appeared on the scene of action the old-fashioned hoopskirts were leaving. But enough of them remained to form the basis of about 'steen million of those wall pockets. Little wire loops fastened together with thread and ornamented with gilt foil, and fixed so that mother could store the papers in it. We didn't have many papers in those days, and magazines were scarce, too. Father took "Hearth and Home," and the "Missouri Globe"—I think that was the name, anyhow it is now the "Globe-Democrat"—and the "Christian Standard," and a paper printed at the county seat. Mother took the "Christian Monitor," edited by Mrs. H. M. B. Goodwin, and it used to have a dandy "Children's Corner." I remember what a lot of good boys and girls used to figure in the stories in that "corner." If ever one of my six kiddies develops into as good a child as some Mrs. Goodwin used to write about I'll become frightened about its health. But best of all the literature that came into that little home was "The Nursery." My, I wish I could get hold of a magazine these days that furnished half such good reading! I can remember when "The Nursery" consolidated with "St. Nicholas," and how it came to me as a very personal affliction, for I didn't cotton to "St. Nicholas" a bit. I didn't find anything to take the place of "The Nursery" until father began buying me the Oliver Optic stories. He tried to inveigle me into reading the "Rollo Books," but I had the good sense to decline. Doubtless I've been remiss in my duty to my own children, but, thank goodness, I never tried to palm off those stupid "Rollo Books" on them!

Now just turn the other quarter way round and face that Mason & Hamlin organ again. That was the great thing in that home. Always

open and standing up in front of you was the "Christian Hymn and Tune Book," unless it happened to be that one—let's see, what was the name of it? Well, never mind the name; you remember some of the songs in it, anyway. There was "The Singin' Skewl," and "Hear Dem Bells," and "Come Where the Lilies Bloom," and "One Day Nearer, Sings the Sailor," and "Twinkling Stars are Laughing, Love," and "Kathleen Mavourneen," and a lot of one, two and three finger exercises, and a chart showing the organ keys with the most supple sort of a looking hand intended to show us just how to finger those aforesaid keys. Ever see anybody finger a keyboard that way? I never did. Course the book contained a lot of other things, but the leaves containing the above were the most thumbed ones in the book. Thank goodness that book, nor any other in that little home, contained never a "rag time" song, nor one of those "June-moon-spoon" abominations! We didn't see much sheet music in those days, did we? But what we did see was worth while. Let's see—there was "Sweet Belle Mahone," and "Ring the Bell Softly, There's Crepe on the Door," and "Lincoln's Funeral March," and some others that I'd like to hear once or twice more.

But that front room carpet! Ah, there was the real work of art! I can see the bunch of good women sewing the rags that went into that "hit and miss" carpet. I can see mother making the dyes that colored the—let's see, didn't they call it the "chain"? Well, you know what I mean, anyhow. For a month after coloring it mother's hands would have made a pretty fair sample of Joseph's coat. And I can almost hear the blif-bang! of Grandma Freeman's loom as she wove that carpet. I've got two or three rugs in my unpretentious home right now, any one of which cost 'steen times as much as that rag carpet, but I'd trade the whole lot of 'em for that carpet, just the same. Of course the Little Woman would not hear to it, but I would. Some of these days I hope to be rich enough to be able to buy a rag carpet like that for my "den." Just wait a few moments!

All right now. During those few moments I closed my eyes and saw that little front room again—carpet, Mason & Hamlin organ, pictures—everything. I saw a sweet-faced mother gently rocking to and fro, knitting by the light of a kerosene lamp with a green shade. I saw reading by that same light a big, broad-shouldered, bewhiskered man whose face seldom looked stern, and when it did the stern look was belied by a lot of little wrinkles about a pair of eyes that seemed always to be smiling. I saw four or five splint-bottomed chairs with backs so straight they made your spine ache whenever you thought about them. I saw the big Bible lying on the little standtable in the corner. And in that few moments I saw father open it, just as the clock struck nine, turn a few leaves and then read: "For we know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens." Then we four, father, mother, sister and I knelt while father prayed.

Ah me! Long years ago that little mother felt the dissolving of "this tabernacle" and joyfully journeyed to that "house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens," and a few months ago, that big, stalwart father, his life work finished, smilingly dropped asleep to awaken in that same house "eternal in the heavens," to meet again the life companion who had so long preceded him.

Well, well, well! It just seems

(Continued on Page 15.)

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